NPT/CONF.2010/PC.III/WP.36

Preparatory Committee for the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

13 May 2009
English
Original: French

Third session
New York, 4-15 May 2009

Nuclear disarmament: France's practical commitment

Working paper submitted by France

"Rather than making speeches and promises that are not translated into deeds, France takes action". (Speech delivered in Cherbourg on 21 March 2008)

1. France's action in the areas of proliferation prevention, arms control and disarmament is based on steadfast principles: working for a safer world and a fairer international order founded on the rule of law and collective security; preventing threats against peace; respecting the right to self-defence; refusing to engage in the arms race; and working towards general and complete disarmament. In accordance with the objectives of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) regarding nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament, which it has endorsed, France has adopted significant unilateral measures (see annex). As pointed out by the President of the Republic on 21 March 2008 in the speech that he gave in Cherbourg, France founds its doctrine of deterrence on the principle of strict sufficiency. France has always sought to maintain its nuclear arsenal at the lowest possible level compatible with the strategic context.

I. Action taken by France

2. France has an exemplary record, unique in the world, with regard to nuclear disarmament. It was the first State, together with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, to have signed and ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); the first State to have decided to shut down and dismantle its facilities for the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons; the only nuclear-weapon State to have dismantled, in a transparent manner, its nuclear test site in the Pacific; the only State to have dismantled its ground-to-ground nuclear missiles; and the only State to have voluntarily reduced the number of its nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines by a third.

II. Decisions taken by France

3. In 2008, the President of the Republic announced that France would reduce by a third the number of nuclear weapons, missiles and aircraft in its airborne component.

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Following that reduction, France's total arsenal will comprise fewer than 300 nuclear warheads, that is, half the maximum number of warheads that it had during the cold war. In providing this information, France is completely transparent, as it has no other weapons besides those in its operational stocks.

4. As another demonstration of a desire for transparency, the President of the Republic decided to invite international experts to observe the dismantlement of the Pierrelatte and Marcoule facilities for the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons. France organized this visit on 16 September 2008 for representatives of more than 40 member States of the Conference on Disarmament, and on 16 March 2009 for non-governmental experts. This was the first time a nuclear-weapon State had opened the doors of its former military nuclear facilities.

5. In addition, France has consistently and explicitly worked towards disarmament at the international level. During its Presidency of the European Union in 2008, France was firmly committed to enabling Europe to develop for the first time ambitious initiatives in this field.

III. What France and its European partners propose

6. On the basis of the proposals made by its head of State in Cherbourg, France, together with its European partners, presented a disarmament plan of action with a view to the upcoming 2010 NPT Review Conference, which was endorsed by the European Union's 27 heads of State and Government in December 2008:

- Universal ratification of the CTBT and completion of its verification regime, and dismantling, as soon as possible, of all nuclear testing facilities, in a manner that is transparent and open to the international community
- Immediate opening, without preconditions, of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and observance of an immediate moratorium on the production of such materials
- Development of confidence-building and transparency measures by the nuclear Powers
- Further progress in the discussions under way between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on the development of a legally binding post-START arrangement (negotiations on the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms), and overall reduction of global nuclear-weapon stockpiles pursuant to article VI of the NPT, in particular by the States with the biggest arsenals
- Inclusion of tactical nuclear weapons, by those States that have them, in general arms control and disarmament processes, with a view to their reduction and elimination
- Opening of consultations on a treaty banning short- and intermediate-range ground-to-ground missiles
- Universal subscription to and implementation of the Hague Code of Conduct
- Mobilization in all other areas of disarmament.

Annex

Nuclear disarmament: France's practical commitment

Action taken by France

Type of measure	*Action taken*	*Comments*
Scaling down of deterrent forces since the end of the cold war	• Complete dismantling of ground-to-ground component • Scaling down of naval component: reduction in the number of active ballistic missile submarines from six to four • Scaling down of airborne component: – Early withdrawal of the AN52 nuclear bombs carried by Jaguar and Mirage III aircraft – Removal of strategic Mirage IV aircraft from nuclear missions • As announced in 2008, reduction by one third of the number of nuclear weapons, missiles and aircraft in the airborne component, bringing France's total arsenal to fewer than 300 nuclear warheads	"France applies a principle of strict sufficiency. It maintains its arsenal at the lowest possible level compatible with the strategic context" (Cherbourg speech, 21 March 2008). Of the nuclear-weapon-States that have deployed ground-to-ground nuclear-weapon systems, France is the only one to have eliminated the latter completely. Taking into account the mea ures announced by the President of the Republic on 21 March 2008, the number of nuclear weapon delivery vehicles has been reduced by more than half since 1985. **We propose opening consultations on a treaty prohibiting short- and medium-range ground-to-ground missiles.**
Modification of the operational characteristics of nuclear forces	• De-targeting announced in 1997 subsequently reaffirmed on several occasions, most recently in 2008 • Reduction of alert status of the two components in 1992 and 1996. These alert level reductions affected both the response times of forces and the number of weapons systems	"When international security improves, France acts accordingly [...] **I can confirm that none of our weapons are targeted against anyone**" (Cherbourg speech).
Cessation of production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons	• Cessation of plutonium production in 1992, and of highly enriched uranium in 1996 • Decision to decommission and dismantle the relevant installations at Pierrelatte and Marcoule. The dismantling process is currently being implemented and entails a cost of €6.1 billion, €1.6 billion of which have already been invested	France is the only State that has decided to dismantle the facilities for the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and has implemented that decision. We call for the immediate opening of negotiations without preconditions on a **treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons**. We also call upon all concerned States to **dismantle their production capabilities**. **We call for the establishment of a moratorium on the production of such materials with immediate effect.**

Type of measure	*Action taken*	*Comments*
Cessation of nuclear testing	• Definitive cessation of nuclear testing announced on 20 January 1996 • Dismantling of the facilities at its Pacific testing centre announced in 1996 and completed in late July 1998 • Support for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), signed by France on 24 September 1996 and ratified on 6 April 1998. Active technical and financial support to the CTBT Provisional Technical Secretariat	The only nuclear-weapon State which has closed and dismantled its nuclear testing centre. France today no longer has facilities allowing it to carry out nuclear tests. **We call for the dismantling of all nuclear testing sites, in a manner that is transparent and open to the international community.** **We call for the universal ratification of the CTBT** as well as for the completion of its verification regime.
Transparency	• Doctrine: speech by the President of France delivered on 21 March 2008 explaining the French deterrence doctrine • Capacities: the **total** French arsenal will contain **fewer than 300 nuclear warheads**. Announcement that France has no nuclear arms in reserve • Unprecedented visit by the member States of the Conference on Disarmament (16 September 2008) and non-governmental experts (16 March 2009) to the former Pierrelatte and Marcoule facilities for the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons	"I have also decided that France could and should be more transparent with respect to its nuclear arsenal than anyone ever has been. After this reduction, our arsenal will include fewer than 300 nuclear warheads. That is half of the maximum number of warheads that we had during the cold war. In giving this information, France is being completely transparent because it has no other weapons besides those in its operational stockpile" (Cherbourg speech). **France is observing the rules of transparency, which builds confidence.** We hope that others will join us on this path. **The pursuit of disarmament is based on trust, transparency and reciprocity. We call upon the nuclear powers to agree upon measures of transparency and trust.**